



Visitors light candles in the Church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin. Photo left: The markets of Trajan once served Roman citizens as an early version of today's shopping malls. The site features various tributes to Roman emperors.

History comes alive in every corner of Italy's capital Embracing the Eternal City

Rome beckons travelers from far and wide

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A survey among Europeans by *Reader's Digest* magazine last summer found Italy and its citizens as ranking tops in most categories including the most liked, best food, sexiest and best country in which to reside.

Notsurprisingly, the Italian capital was ranked as one of Europe's favorite cities by citizens of both "Old" and "New" Europe.

Whether one calls Europe home or not, most would agree that Italy's Eternal City is incomparable.

In no other European city does the word breathtaking so aptly apply — both literally and metaphorically.

As one wanders up and down the hills of Rome, clambers up into the dome of St. Peter's Cathedral or climbs one of the thousands of staircases leading to yet another picturesque piazza, remnant of the Roman Empire or church bursting at the seams with renowned works of art, one cannot help but be overwhelmed.

In no other European city, not Athens nor London, does one feel the sheer physical magnitude of humankind's desire to acknowledge the glory of those who have aspired to greatness in the conquest of the

world and the human spirit.

This is a city of grand visions — of things built on a monumental scale to dazzle, to humble and to serve as a memorial to those who have gone before. Whether celebrating the whims of pre-Christian gods in the form of percolating fountains and Renaissance artworks, the imperial significance of deceased Roman emperors such as the city-block-sized mausoleum at Piazza Augustus or the spoils of victory such as the 3,200-year-old Obelisk of Pharaoh Ramses II brought back from Egypt by Ceasar Augustus and put on display in the center of the Piazza del Popolo, there is no overlooking the attempt to make Rome one of the world's great treasures. Every glance is rewarded with yet another striking image — statues, towers, columns, paintings as far as the eye can see, the list goes on and on.

And yet, for all of the historical and religious grandeur, in no other European city do the past and the present blend together so vibrantly. Stores featuring the latest fashions, household utensil designs and popular music lean up against age-old buildings, houses of worship and former palaces. Broad boulevards saturated with honking motorists and perilously weaving motor scooters wind through cobblestone squares, past

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alleys crowded by ancient buildings, former Roman Empire-era marketplaces and overlooked by regal basilicas.

Of course it isn't merely the sights of Rome that serve to stimulate the senses. One comes away from a visit with a rich sensory stockpile. Vivid Biblical images depicted in stone, wood and on canvases are combined with the scent of fragrant incense burning in hundreds of churches throughout the city. Narrow passageways, wide avenues and broad piazzas are full of the aromas of rich coffee, simmering sauces and a whole host of culinary delights guaranteed to please the palate.

While the sound of motor traffic and hoarse Italian mothers cor-

alling young charges dominate the aural landscape, Rome is also home to its share of street musicians, restaurant performers and any number of venues featuring live music. The city's Metro, or subway, is regularly center stage for Gypsy musicians performing classical Italian melodies and folksongs on accordion and small percussive instruments. A meal of clam spaghetti and fried fish at a pizzeria in Trastevere, washed down with a strong, red house wine is easily digested when accompanied by

the music of strolling musicians who frequent restaurants in the area.

A proper visit to Rome takes time. One needs days or even weeks to truly become immersed in all that Rome has to offer. After doing the typical tourist things — sitting on the Spanish Steps, throwing a coin into the Fontana Di Trevi, wandering through the Forum and up Palatine Hill, viewing the Sistine Chapel or taking a boat ride on the Tiber River, one discovers one has merely scratched the surface. Exhibits such as the archaeological findings from Anatolia in Trajan's Marketplace, Leonardo da Vinci's sketches at a gallery in the Church of Santa Maria del Popolo or any number of other attractions are guaranteed to keep visitors occupied for some time to come.

Newcomers to the city might consider hopping on one of the open-topped sightseer buses which stop at several locations throughout the city including the Termini train station, Piazza Venezia, Piazza Navona and the Vatican. Tickets can be purchased on the bus and information is available at www.city-sightseeing.it.

The Rome USO, located at Via del Mascherino, is another option for finding information about daily events and tours. They can be found on the Web at www.uso.org/rome.

Rome, once an overnight trip by train from cities in Germany for most travelers on a budget, is now easily reached in under two hours thanks to inexpensive flights available through discount airlines such as



Ryan Air and Easy Jet. This writer traveled round-trip to Rome for about €60 in the first week of January. Less expensive accommodations are easier to find during the off-season. Various websites feature a wide variety of hotels and hostels.

For information about flights and accommodations visit the Ryan Air website at www.ryanair.com. Information about trips to Rome is also available at SATOTravel.

For more information about the history, sights and other attractions of Rome, visit your local library. The "Let's Go Italy" and "Italy with Kids" books are highly recommended.



A youngster puts his hand in La Bocca della Verita (the Mouth of Truth) for a photo. Legend has it that it will bite the hand of those who tell lies. Photo right: Visitors toss coins into the Fontana di Trevi in the hopes of a speedy return visit to the Eternal City.



A climb up to the interior of the dome and roof of Saint Peter's Basilica offers a breathtaking view of the Vatican and Rome. Photo left: sightseers make their way through the Roman Forum and up Palatine Hill.



Shoppers and sightseers make their way through the Trastevere section of Rome — an area known for its restaurants, nightlife and picturesque churches. Photo above left: Visitors pose with men dressed as Roman legionnaires for a photo outside the Colosseum.